



FINDING AID

Yellowstone National Park BIRD PROGRAM RECORDS 1875-Present (bulk dates: 1930-2013)

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Catalog Number: RG01-BIRD

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HISTORY

Bird studies were originally undertaken by outside scientists and other government branches such as the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW) and its predecessors. It was not until the 1920s when monitoring bird populations became a collateral duty of park naturalists. In 1989, the Yellowstone National Park Bird Program became a distinct program within the Yellowstone Center for Resources (YCR).

- 1919: Trumpeter Swans first documented in the park, and considered to be the last remaining population in the continental United States
- 1920s: Bird monitoring becomes a secondary duty of Park naturalists
- 1921: Christmas Bird Counts begins, and continues to present day
- 1931: Surveys on resident swan populations begin as part of the USFW tri-state swan surveys.
- 1939: Correspondence about birds starts being grouped together in its own files
- 1949-1987: Researcher Kenneth Diem researches the colonial nesters of the Molly Islands
- 1967: Bird observation forms are collected
- 1970s: Annual surveys of the Molly Islands begins
- 1971: Wintering swan populations surveys begin.
- 1979: Mid-winter bald and golden eagle surveys initiated by the National Wildlife Federation
- 1980s: Joe Zarki begins compiling both employee and visitor observations into quarterly reports
- 1982: Breeding Bird Surveys begin and are performed in June of every year
- 1982: The Greater Yellowstone Bald Eagle Working Group established
- 1987: Biweekly winter ground-based surveys of Trumpeter Swanson portions of the Yellowstone and Madison Rivers begins.
- 1989: The Yellowstone National Bird Program officially starts with the hire of a park ornithologist, Terry McEneany
- 1990: The Yellowstone Bird Report starts publishing as a quarterly publication, and switches to an annual one in 1996
- Early 1990s: Trumpeter Swan population starts steepest decline
- 1991: A more formal program of observations is established, including submitting rare bird observations to the Audubon Society and generating annual reports with observations and updates on projects
- 1992: The United States Geological Survey takes over Mid-Winter bald and golden eagle surveys from the National Wildlife Federation
- 1997: The Greater Yellowstone Trumpeter Swan Working Group organized
- 2009: A monitoring project to evaluate the presence and abundance of post-fire adapted bird species begun
- 2011: The Yellowstone Raptor Initiative, a five year project to study diurnal and nocturnal raptors, is initiated

SCOPE AND CONTENT

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK
BIRD PROGRAM RECORDS
1875-Present (bulk dates: 1930-2013)

CATALOG NUMBER RG01-BIRD (YELL 126004)

VOLUME 16.75 LF (37 boxes)

DESCRIPTION Administrative and research records of Yellowstone National Park's Bird Program. The materials in this record group include correspondence, reports, observation and bird return forms, prints, slides, field notes, compiled hydrology data, and annotated published maps. These documents are a result of activities and programs designed to document bird species in the park and to increase or maintain their populations in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE).

Specific areas of study include Yellowstone National Park, Molly Islands of Yellowstone Lake, Harriman State Park, Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, and private ranch land in Paradise Valley, Montana. Subjects include avian fire ecology, reestablishing the Trumpeter Swan population, recreational use management decisions regarding fishing and human impact near nesting/feeding sites, developing a bird observation recording system, and the general development and management of the Bird Program. Historical references to observations include the Christmas Bird Count and correspondence with biologists, rangers, and other governmental departments.

Bird surveys make up a large portion of the collection. Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) organized by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) consists of data collected in the park by the National Park Service (NPS) and results are maintained on the USGS website for BBS routes. Survey data represented in the documents also include parkwide and regional areas inside the park boundary and specific species. A large series of documents contained in the collection relate directly to the Rocky Mountain population of Trumpeter Swans in the GYE, the maintenance of that population, and the elimination of mute swans. Also

reflected is the intensive research and the creation of projects relating to specific species as well as protecting birdlife in the park from fishing with lead weights and other human disturbance. The documents regarding the Colonial Nesters of the Molly Islands track the beginnings of the informal bird program and early management decisions regarding mostly the White Pelican and fishing of Yellowstone Lake.

The correspondence is especially rich as it shows the evolution of previous forms of the Fish and Wildlife Service, their interactions with Yellowstone National Park, and the changing perspective of biology and park use/management through time. Ultimately, this record group consists of documentation from the office of ornithology, activities from private organizations and local, state, and federal government offices that relate to bird management in the GYE. As a result, the records show the historic development of the Yellowstone Bird Program, its relationships with bird societies, and the importance of scientific data to all levels of resource managers, from local to international.

ORGANIZATION

The documents are arranged into five series: 1. Administrative Files 2. Observations, Surveys, and Data 3. Bird Species 4. Raptors 5. Trumpeter Swans.

PROVENANCE

Transferred from the ornithology office, 2007. Additional materials were separated from the larger natural resources record group during processing in 2015. Additional accessions were separated as government records from the Kenneth Diem papers during processing.

RESTRICTIONS

NO

*ASSOCIATED
MATERIALS*

- Objects including bird bands, feathers, skins, and mounts separated to the Natural History Collection, Yellowstone National Park Museum Collections.
- Maps and drawings separated to the Maps & Drawings Collection, Yellowstone National Park Combined Archives.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

I. Administrative Records (1920-2007)

The Bird Program officially began in 1989; prior to that date, Yellowstone's naturalists and administrators performed bird observation and documentation as a collateral duty. The administrative records document the development of the ornithology program. They include correspondence (1939-2007), Yellowstone Nature Notes compilation of bird articles, bird observation checklist development (1946-1988, 1990-2007), and programs including Partners in Flight and Yellowstone Bird Observation Committee. Also included are historical records from the Chief Ranger's Office that track decisions made about bird issues in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and with other agencies and land managers (1931-1953) and assessment and impact mitigation records.

II. Surveys, Observations, and Data (1875-2013; bulk dates: 1984-2013)

This series contains breeding bird surveys, censuses, Christmas Bird Count forms and summaries, completed observation forms, older observation recording systems, and compiled observations tallied from research performed in the Yellowstone Archives and Research Library. This series is especially useful for tracking bird species in the park over time and changes to their populations.

III. Bird Species (1922-2004)

Included are subject files relating to different non-raptor and non-Trumpeter Swan species. Correspondence, photographs, notes, and reports form the bulk of the series. Much of the research is from the late 1980s and on, except for the Molly Islands which covers the 1930s to present.

IV. Raptors (1960-2013)

This series contains materials produced by the ornithology program and other offices with ornithology duties regarding raptor research and projects. Materials include correspondence, maps, data, and observation forms of osprey, eagles, falcons, and other raptors. This series is rich in data relating to bird sightings and surveys, indicating how populations have fluctuated over time. Since Bald Eagles and Ospreys were both endangered species, the series reflects how the park handled and tried to promote the growth of endangered birds.

V. Trumpeter Swans (1889-2013)

This series contains reports, observation forms, charts, maps, and correspondence supporting the activities of Trumpeter Swan management in Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding ecosystem, including Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, and Harriman State Park. The materials document the evolution of wildlife management, interactions between agencies on an issue of shared concern, and the development and professionalization of the program. While the materials span 1889 to 2013, there is a gap between 1953 and 1966. Correspondence, which documents interagency and non-governmental organization (NGO) cooperation on monitoring and conservation efforts, dates primarily to the 1990s through the 2000s.

Primary activities include biannual surveys, conducted in February and September, of the Trumpeter Swan population. The surveys, conducted in conjunction with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service tri-state survey program, began in 1931; the winter survey was added in 1971. A survey location in Paradise Valley, Montana, was included in the autumn and midwinter surveys in 1989 and 1999. Hebgen Lake in Montana was added to the autumn and midwinter count in 2000 and 2005. Swans are also monitored during the nesting season in order to determine the number of non-breeders, territory occupancy, nest success (nests hatching young) as opposed to fledging success (cygnets surviving until September) which is documented via the autumn surveys.

CONTAINER LIST

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SEPARATED MATERIALS

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Yellowstone National Park Productions:

- Fishing with a Conscience (YELL126004-V1), ca. 1995?
- Save the Yellowstone Trumpeter Swan (YELL126004-V2), ca. 1995

Unedited footage:

- Whooping Crane Release (YELL126004-V3), 1998

Digital Records Born digital images, digital surrogates of negatives and videos